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INFO RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1037
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UNCLAS CARACAS 001233

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SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO MAJORS DESIGNATION NEGATIVE

¶1. (SBU) During a September 17 press conference, Venezuelan Minister of Interior and Justice Tarek El Aissami gave the Venezuelan government (GBRV) response to the Presidential Determination for Major Drug-Transit and Major Illicit Drug-Producing Countries (the Majors). El Aissami described the Majors report as bordering on "immoral, cynical and hypocritical." Describing U.S. drug control policy as "failure after failure," the Minister suggested that the United States should, "decertify itself out of shame." El Aissami repeated the charge made by President Chavez on his September 13 episode of "Alo Presidente" that the DEA "had become the main drug cartel operating in the United States."

¶2. (SBU) President Chavez, speaking during a September 17 televised event, admitted not having read the report, and added that he would study it carefully to see if Venezuela was being accused of supporting drug trafficking. Chavez also announced that he was considering a airplane shoot-down policy for Venezuela. "I don't like the idea," said Chavez, "but others have the policy." Chavez revealed that drug pilots ignore or laugh at orders to land from Venezuelan authorities. Chavez warned the "Colombian and Yanqui" drug traffickers that he was seriously considering the issue (a shoot-down policy).

¶3. (SBU) Both local and syndicated press reported Chavez's informal comments that he considered the waiver to fund civil society groups in Venezuela as funding for opposition groups to conspire against him.

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